

OVER THE MOUNTAINS

CONTINUED FROM LAST SUNDAY BY ROBERT BARR COPYRIGHT, 1903, BY ROBERT BARR

"Who are you?" asked the captain. "My name is William Armstrong," replied the rider, simply. In spite of himself, the stolid face of the leader showed some surprise at the announcement, as if it were unexpected, and as if he knew the name.

"Where are you from?" "I came across the border this morning. I am a cattle dealer, and as there is little doing in my own country I thought I would just see if business was better on this side of the line. This amusing lunatic said there was cattle for sale in the valley, and led me higher, for which service I paid him a trifle."

"And so there is, and so there is," cried the lunatic, "but the price was for my advice, not for the leading hither. I must get my pay for that yet. Aye, there's cattle for sale here, and I'm the market man."

"Pence to you, folly," cried the captain, scowling. Then, curiously, to the horseman. "Dismount!" Armstrong sprang to the ground.

"Your sword," demanded the officer. The weapon was handed to him. "Do cattle dealers in your country carry arms?"

"To tell you the truth," said the young man with a laugh, "they do not they would carry little money home with them. I not only carry arms, but know how to use them on occasion."

"I ask to see your papers giving you permission to travel in England."

"I have none. Scotland is at peace with England, and a citizen of my country should not require papers in visiting England, any more than an Englishman would need the same to go from one end of Scotland to the other."

"Humph!" growled the captain. "You are well versed in the law. I hope you are engaged in no enterprise that is contrary to it."

"I hope not, captain. If you are king's men you maintain that you are upholding the law. If you are parliamentarians, you swear the same thing."

"We swear not at all."

"Then I surmise you are no king's men. But, in any case, until one or other of you have declared war against Scotland, or until Scotland has declared war against either of you, or both, you meddle with a free citizen of Scotland at your peril."

"It is perhaps wisest to indulge in no threats."

"I am not indulging in any. I am stating a plain, uncontrovertible fact, that would be held by none so stoutly as by General Cromwell himself."

"Then keep your dissertations on law until you see the general, which is like to happen before we are done with you."

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to have a discourse with that distinguished man. He is a fighter after my own heart, and I understand he is equally powerful in controversy."

"Search him."

To this order Armstrong not only made no objection, but assisted in its fulfillment. He took off his doublet and threw it to one of the men who approached him; then held his arms outstretched that another might, with greater ease, conduct his examination. A third paid him the saddle, and the saddlebag, and a fourth took the saddle itself off the horse. The search brought to light some papers that conveyed excellent information regarding steers and cows, but nothing about politics.

The officer had utilized the interval in writing a brief dispatch, which he now handed to the young horseman. "Ride hard and give that to General Cromwell as soon as you can. In case you should lose it, tell him we have got our man, who crossed the border this morning. Say that the gentleman is at Corbion Manor, as directed, and expect to reach there before dusk."

The youth, without reply or salute, pocketed the papers, and sprang into the saddle, and was off like the wind. Armstrong watching the pair with a glow of admiration in his eyes. Although unused to the life of a camp, he was much struck by the absence of any attempt at secrecy in the proceedings. There was no effort to bewilder the prisoner or make a mystery of the affair. That his advent had been expected was perfectly clear, and that a written description of his person had been distributed along the border was equally evident. They had been watching for him and now they had him. There was no military fuss about the matter, and apparently very little discipline, yet instant and unquestioned obedience, without accompaniment of formal reference to authority, was the result of salute to superiors. But underneath it all was a hint of power and efficiency. Armstrong realized that he was in the clutch of an admirably constructed human machine that knew what it wanted and went straight for it. No one had spoken except the captain, yet every man was on the alert to do whatever the captain said instantly, capably and in silence.

At a word from the captain a bugle call rang out and its effect was soon apparent. An accoutred horse was led to the captain, who sprang into his place with the ease of one accustomed to the feat, and from the buildings appeared something like a score of mounted troopers.

"Get into your saddles!" commanded the captain, addressing Armstrong. The latter tested the buckling, which a soldier had just finished, drew up the strap a point, and with his foot in the stirrup turned and asked:

"Am I to consider myself a prisoner, sir?"

"Whatever questions you wish to put will be answered presently by one higher in authority than I."

"I must protest against this detention, sir."

"Your protest will doubtless be considered by the officer I referred to."

"General Cromwell, I surmise, is at Corbion Manor, a large country house, which was seemingly the headquarters of a considerable section of the army encamped in the neighborhood. Into a room of this mansion Armstrong was conducted and left under guard and he was pleased to see by the spread table that there was at least no design on the part of his captors to starve him.

CHAPTER X. GRIPPED.

The owner of the mansion of Corbion had been Richard Sir Richard Corbion, one of the first to fall under the pikes of Cromwell's men. Now it was heavily garrisoned by the Roundheads, as Armstrong surmised from the sounds of singing that rang out through the night. But suddenly the noise ceased. For a sentinel had pounded on the door with the butt of his pike, crying:

"Peace within there; the general is coming."

From the darkness emerged three

horsesmen, two following a leader, a thick-set man, who came somewhat stiffly to the ground as if fatigued with hard riding. To the man who sprang to the bridle he said curtly: "See the horse well rubbed down and half an hour feed him with corn." Then to his two followers: "Look to your horses first and to yourselves afterwards. Be ready in an hour."

"His men were armed with staves only," said Wentworth, better equipped, held his own against them.

"What view did the court take of his affairs?"

"They thought it merely a feint to cover the retreat of a discovered traitor. The night, as I said, was dark, and our men being mounted, could not move silently. Knowing the house

general did not look up for a full minute, until he had finished the sentence 'making them then he raised his head and said quietly to the captain:

"Go."

"For one brief and lamentable instant the discipline which held the captain in its bonds relaxed and he replied in surprise:

"And leave him unguarded, sir?"

"It is very like you are right. Spies, unfortunately, seem to be necessary when a country is in a state of war. Mitted, including the arresting of innocent men, but I am anxious nothing shall be done that will give just cause of offense to Scotland, a God-fearing country and a friendly neighbor. When such justice happens, as it has happened in your case, I try to make amends. How far south do you propose to travel?"

"I may go to the length of Manchester or Birmingham. The distance and the time will depend on the state of trade."

"If you will tell me the places you intend to visit I will include them in the pass I shall now write for you."

"That I cannot just say at the moment. I wish to follow trade wherever it leads me."

"Then an inclusive pass, extending as far south as Manchester, will meet your needs."

"It will more than meet them, general," said Armstrong with supreme indifference.

The commander took up his pen, but paused, and still shading his face, scrutinized the man before him.

"As I am not likely to see you again, perhaps it is as well not to limit it to Manchester. You may wish to travel further south when you reach that town."

"It is hardly possible."

"As you carry no message from Traquair to the king, I can write Oxford on your permit as easily as Manchester."

"Thank you, general, but Manchester will be far enough."

"I may say that we are strict about those whom we allow to journey to and fro at the present time, and if you would overstep the limit of this document you are liable to investigation and delay, and I am not likely to be so near at hand on the next occasion."

"I quite understand, and if I wished to go further south I could have no hesitation in begging permission of your excellency, but I doubt if I shall ever see Manchester."

"You will not be leaving Corbion until the morning, or will you?"

"No, general. I know when I am well housed."

"Then, as I have much to do, I will make out your paper later, and it will be handed to you in the morning."

"Thank you, general."

With this the commander rose and himself accompanied Armstrong to the door in most friendly manner. The young man, in spite of his distrust, was very favorably impressed, for there had been nothing in Cromwell's conversation that hinted of the king's forces, and he was not a man to be easily deceived.

"Will you oblige me by closing that door, which Captain Bent has stupidly left open? You are nearer it than I."

"Oh, yes, excellency, and he acquiesced himself bravely enough."

"No hanging back, no wavering in the face of the foe?"

"No, excellency."

"Humph! Send Captain Bent to me with the papers. When he is gone, I wish you to bring me a trooper, some silent man who can be depended upon, an unerring marksman."

When Captain Bent arrived he handed to the general the papers he had taken from Armstrong. Cromwell examined them with great minuteness by the light of the candles, then set them in a bunch on the table, without comment of any kind.

"Did your prisoner resist at all or make an attempt at escape?"

"No, general."

"He made no protest, then?"

"He said England and Scotland were at peace, that he therefore needed no passport; that his arrest was illegal, and that you would be the first to admit as much."

"Humph! Was he thoroughly searched? Are you sure he had no other papers than these?"

"Quite sure, general."

"Very good. Bring the man here. If it is shut, wait until you are called."

"And was arrested there?"

"No, excellency. An unlooked-for event happened. He rode out from the grounds of the hall, fighting his way, as it happened, against a band of Rudby's followers who were attacking him, and ran into the arms of our men, who were watching for him. The attacking party, seeing, as they supposed, an unknown force of rescuers, turned and fled. The night was very dark, and the account of what took place is confused, but Wentworth was carried back to Corbion, tried and condemned for deserting while on duty, and holding commerce with the enemy."

"Umph! What version did Wentworth give of the affair?"

"He maintained he was no traitor, but did not give any explanation of his absence from duty."

"I thought Rudby had surrendered all arms and had taken the oath to remain neutral."

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"Go."

"For one brief and lamentable instant the discipline which held the captain in its bonds relaxed and he replied in surprise:

"And leave him unguarded, sir?"

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You shall buy it of me and I shall pay the price, even though I do not forgive the crime."

"We will first, if you please, clear up the charge of treachery. You were visiting your own country last night, and as it is on the further side of Rudby Hall your ancestors naturally thought you had a rendezvous there?"

"No, general. It was my intention to have visited Rudby Hall."

"The residence of that foul malignant, Lord Rudby, so-called?"

"Yes, but not to see his lordship, who is my enemy, personal as well as political."

The scowl vanished from the face of his questioner and something almost resembling a laugh came from his firm lips.

"You are truthful and it pleases me. Why did you make a foolish mystery of your excursions? I take the case to stand thus. Your grandfather and Rudby were old friends, and you, to see the girl, who is doubtless as silly as the rest of her class, as you will discover if I let you live. Stands the case not thus?"

"In a measure, sir, it does, saving any reflection on my lady, who—"

"Surely, surely. I know what you would say, for I was once your age and as young in folly. The question is, if you will risk your life for her, will you do what I ask of you to earn the girl and your life, or will you refuse, and let her go to another?"

"Then heaven's will, there was here before me, where you now stand, some moments since, the most plausible liar in the kingdom. He told me truths, which were doubtless as true as his treachery to his friends, but which were well aware I already knew. This was to baffle me into believing him. He rides to Oxford to see the king, and in the town will risk his life to see the king who sends him—little good will it do any of them. In return the king is to give him a commission, to be handed to certain lords in Scotland, which commission crosses the border we are like to have a blaze to the north of us, which I do not wish to see kindled until we have a year from now, then, by God—then, by God's will, I shall be ready for them. We shall defeat the Scots in any case, but if this commission reaches